

VZCZCXRO1219
RR RUEHPA
DE RUEHFN #0449 3220829
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 180829Z NOV 09
FM AMEMBASSY FREETOWN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2986
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L FREETOWN 000449

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W (JHUNTER)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/18/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [KCOR](#) [SL](#)
SUBJECT: SLPP PULLS NO PUNCHES TO DISCREDIT GOVERNMENT IN
ADVANCE OF THE CG

REF: FREETOWN 425

Classified By: A/DCM Amy LeMar for reasons 1.4 (b/d)

11. (C) Summary: On November 16, the SLPP released to the media a letter from party Chairman John Benjamin to President Koroma. The letter outlines four pages of alleged grievances, ranging from corruption and nepotism to inter-party squabbles. While the letter was dated November 12, its release was clearly timed to discredit Koroma and his government the day before the Consultative Group (CG) meeting in London was due to start. Further, the SLPP reportedly released rumors that musicians favoring their party had been arrested on November 16 for performing anti-government music. While these rumors were unfounded, they created significant concern among CG participants, some of whom would not be appeased until they received clarification from missions in Freetown. The SLPP's tactics are unsurprising, but still disappointing: in their effort to paint Koroma in a negative light, they are also tarnishing the image of the country as a whole by airing alleged dirty laundry on the eve of a significant opportunity for donor funding and support. End Summary.

12. (C) The letter provided a lengthy list of perceived APC transgressions, including reference to the lawsuit against the Vice President (reftel), preferential treatment in the procurement process for the President's relatives, and improper use of government and donor funds by government ministers and others. The letter also alleged that APC members receive the bulk of government appointments and that SLPP supporters were removed from their positions because of their political affiliations. It referenced the ongoing chieftancy elections, stating that the APC has politically interfered in that process. While the sections on nepotism were more detailed, many of the references were unsubstantiated, and used language such as "we have heard" and "the information around (town) says that..." The letter closed with an admonishment that invitations to international forums by the government should be directed to the party secretariat and not individuals. This is likely a reference to invitations given to specific SLPP members of parliament to attend UNGA and the CG.

13. (C) Despite suggestions that the letter was simply meant to voice concerns about the state of Koroma's administration, the letter deliberately targeted CG attendees: the UN, DFID, World Bank, and EU were the primary recipients. Though an inherently political document, the SLPP's usual interlocutors, such as post and the British High Commission, were omitted from the distribution. According to contacts, DFID and World Bank representatives were concerned about the letter's contents and its possible impact on the CG. These fears, as well as fears about the falsely reported arrests of SLPP-supporting musicians, were allayed by the High Commission's political section. That section agrees with post that the letter is a deliberately-timed and typical attempt to besmirch the President.

14. (C) Comment: The SLPP are showing no signs of increased sophistication in their rhetoric: this letter is another example of their attempts to turn unsubstantiated claims into fact by putting them down on paper. It also demonstrates their continued inability to highlight legitimate concerns in an effective way, since even valid concerns (such as the Vice President's pending lawsuit in the U.S.) are framed alongside invalid or overreaching analysis. Public reaction to the letter has been mixed, but has tended to concur with post's perspective that this letter casts a negative shadow over the country during what could be a very lucrative trade and investment conference. Rather than focus on presenting themselves as a responsible opposition, identifying issues at appropriate times and supporting the country's overall priorities, the SLPP instead show their immaturity: the APC will get the credit if the conference succeeds, and can now pass on at least some of the blame to the SLPP if it fails. End Comment.
CRISS